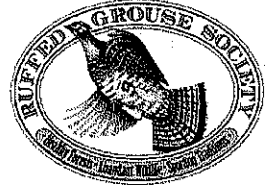




Ruffed Grouse Society  
and American Woodcock Society



May 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016

The Honorable Darwin Boohar  
State Senator, 35<sup>th</sup> District

The Honorable Tom Casperson  
State Senator, 38<sup>th</sup> District

The Honorable Phil Pavlov  
State Senator, 25<sup>th</sup> District

The Honorable David Robertson  
State Senator, 14<sup>th</sup> District

The Honorable Jim Stamas  
State Senator, 36<sup>th</sup> District

The Honorable Rebekah Warren  
State Senator, 18<sup>th</sup> District

Dear Senators:

The Ruffed Grouse Society and American Woodcock Society (RGS) appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback on Senate Bills 39 and 40. Below are our comments on specific sections of the bills. We reviewed these bills with a focus on how they would impact upland hunters, primarily ruffed grouse and American woodcock hunters, as well as the timber industry that our sport relies on to maintain suitable amounts of young forest habitat.

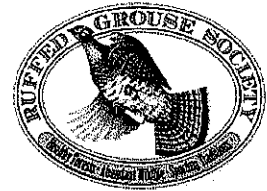
It is worth noting up front that ruffed grouse and woodcock hunters are unusually dependent on access to public lands, more so than any other kind of hunter. This is due to the fact that most hunters will travel to numerous sites in one day, require large tracts of actively managed forests, and pursue quarry that is more dispersed over the landscape. Few people own enough property for a full, or even half day, worth of grouse or woodcock hunting. Thus, we are keenly interested in the protection and management of our public lands. This is especially important in a time when the general population is becoming more urbanized and disconnected from our natural resources and the number of hunters is declining. Multiple research projects have shown that one of the biggest factors in the success of recruiting and retaining new hunters is having access to land to hunt on.

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Senate Bill 39

**Page 10, starting at line 20:** These sections have language that will make it more difficult for the state to acquire land where long term active forest management can be conducted and appears to put the interests of individual local bodies of government over that of the state and citizens who live in one of the other 1239 townships or 82 counties in Michigan. It also appears to potentially block sales of land from a willing seller to a willing buyer. We are not supportive of these provisions as they would make it more difficult for the state to acquire land open to hunting, outdoor recreation, and long term active forest management. If land is sold to the state it will become part of their long term third party certified forest management process and add to the areas where people can recreate and the timber industry can prosper. If people are forced to sell their land on the private market the chances that it will be parceled up and the public denied access increase. Research has shown that smaller private parcels are less likely to be actively managed for timber products.

**Page 19, line 17:** The wording establishing the right of the public to petition for the removal of berms/gates and establishing a detailed process that the state must follow to address these petitions is disturbing. First, this section does not establish the right of the public to petition for the *installation* of berms/gates to facilitate specific preferences. Barriers are often needed to preserve road and trail surfaces, minimize maintenance costs, protect water quality, meet wildlife management goals, provide unique recreational opportunities, or prevent costly damage to roads used for timber harvesting.

Given the tens of thousands of berms and gates on state lands this process would be an enormous burden on the DNR requiring extraordinary amounts of time, energy, and money that would be better directed towards managing our wildlife and timber resources. This wording is also a potential tool that anti-logging and anti-hunting groups could use to essentially sequester DNR staff and funding in this review process. DNR staff that should be managing wildlife habitat and conducting forest management would instead be dedicated to addressing public petitions and planning meetings regarding individual berms or gates.

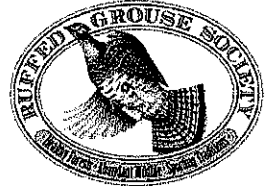
An alternative for the conveyance of information regarding individual barriers could be incorporated into the established compartment review process. As the DNR's mapping software continues to improve, the ability to identify and describe individual berms and barriers has been enhanced. In order to provide more detailed information on the need/rationale for these structures a requirement that the DNR identify and provide a description for the necessity of berms and barriers as they conduct compartment reviews could be established. This information may be able to be added to the MI-HUNT mapping software but

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could certainly be made available online or at local DNR offices. Individuals wanting more information about a berm or barrier could readily find this information and if they are concerned about the presence, or absence, of a berm they could participate in the annual compartment review process.

**Page 21, line 2:** We are concerned about this section as it does not specifically address how it would impact conservation officers as they carry out their duties.

**Page 24, line 23:** RGS and others have been working for decades to help people understand that “game” and “nongame” habitat are the same thing. Game and nongame wildlife don’t exist in separate silos, they share the same landscapes, and the state should do everything possible to reinforce this basic tenet of wildlife conservation.

Focusing on what are considered “non-game” species is also an excellent way to receive funding that benefits all wildlife and Michigan residents. For example, RGS is currently in a partnership with the American Bird Conservancy and others on a 5 year, \$5 million grant from the Natural Resources Conservation Service that is focusing on the creation of habitat for golden-winged warblers. These small songbirds require very specific habitat that is also extensively used by ruffed grouse, American woodcock, moose, white-tailed deer, wild turkeys and numerous other species. Because of this grant we have federal funds being spent on private lands across northern Michigan (Entirely in Districts 35, 36, 37, and 38, see enclosed Fact Sheet). The grant pays for forest management planning and treatments from start to finish and the money ends up in the landowner’s pockets and/or that of the foresters and loggers that they hire. If the grant application was focused on turkeys, grouse or white-tailed deer it would not have been funded. The grant program specifically requested proposals addressing “at-risk” species, and the golden-winged warbler is just such a species.

There are numerous other examples of “non-game” projects like this. The confining wording in this bill would stifle this type of work limiting the DNR and conservation organizations like ours in their fundraising efforts and essentially redirect federal dollars from Michigan to other states.

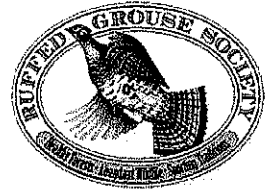
**Page 25, line 12:** It is unclear whether DNR staff time would be considered a resource. Supporting university research is not only good for teaching Michigan’s future natural resource professionals but also an excellent way for us to learn more about managing our forests and wildlife and educating the public on the benefits of active forest management. We feel that this should be encouraged whenever possible and not depend on the staffing levels of the DNR.

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**Page 26, line 25:** This section expands the ability of the state to sell public hunting lands while allowing for the process to be confidential. We are opposed to this broad language and lack of transparency. Neither are appropriate nor helpful if an objective of the legislation is to secure the future of public recreation on public lands. This language opens the door to the sale of existing state lands including locations used by upland hunters and sustainably managed for forest products. Hunters, mushroom pickers, birders, ORV riders, loggers, campground owners, nobody who depends on public lands for their livelihood or recreation benefits from this wording.

**Page 34, line 6:** We see value in a Qualified Conservation Organization being given preference in a sale as referenced because we feel they are more likely to maintain public access, suitable wildlife habitat, and active forest management activities on the purchased lands.

**Page 35, line 1:** Grouse and woodcock hunters are reliant on public lands and large scale active forest management like no other hunters. This provision, and the other provisions streamlining the sale of public lands, threaten our sport and the timber industry that we rely on to maintain habitat for young forest species.

**Page 38, line 16:** Our comments for this section are the same as those for Page 24, line 23.

**Page 39, line 21:** V and VI are excellent additions. But, VII is confusing as it divides forest management and wildlife habitat which are essentially one and the same for young forest species.

**Page 40, line 26:** Line ii is also an excellent addition and something that our organization spends a considerable amount of time doing.

**Senate Bill 40**

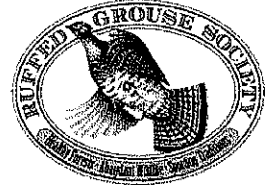
**Page 3, line 1:** We are very supportive of the natural resource management and recreation activities outlined and frequently raise funds specifically to address these issues on State lands. But, we do not agree with the diversion of money away from the original intent of this fund, namely, the acquisition of additional public lands open to hunting and timber management.

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Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments.

Best Regards

Eric Ellis  
Regional Wildlife Biologist and Grant Writer  
Lower Peninsula and Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan, Indiana, Ohio

Meadow Kouffeld-Hansen  
Regional Wildlife Biologist  
Western Upper Peninsula and Minnesota

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